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Movin' Out

Domestic Migration to and from California in the 1990s

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Summary

California has traditionally attracted large numbers of international immigrants as well as domestic migrants (those who move here from other states). During the 1990s, however, domestic migration to and from California changed dramatically. As many as two million more people left California to live in other states than came to California from those states. This large net outflow is unprecedented in California's history. We seek to characterize this exodus: Who are these former Californians? Why did they leave? And what does this movement portend for the state?

Domestic migrants who left California tend to be less educated, more likely to be unemployed, and more likely to live in poverty than those moving to California. Seventy percent of all migrants leaving or coming to California were white, although the state also experienced substantial net domestic outflows of Latinos throughout the 1990s.

Most domestic migrants to and from California seem to move for economic reasons. The mass outflow of the early 1990s coincided with California's deepest recession since the depression of the 1930s. Also, the vast majority of domestic migrants are young adults, who move more frequently than others to enhance their economic opportunities.

The recovery of domestic migration to California in the late 1990s suggests that the earlier outflows do not represent a long-term pattern. By the end of the decade, however, California was still sending as many migrants to other states as it was receiving from those states. It remains to be seen whether California will return to the substantial domestic migration inflows that have long characterized the state's demographic past.

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Until recently, domestic migration was a much larger source of population growth than international immigration.

Introduction

In the 1990s, California experienced a large influx of immigrants but a net outflow of domestic, or state-to-state, migrants. Immigration patterns have received a good deal of attention, but this domestic outflow is also remarkable, if only because California's population has always been shaped as much by state-to-state migration as by international immigration. Until recently, in fact, domestic migration was a much larger source of population growth than international immigration. At the time of the 1990 census, for example, over half of California's residents were not natives, and almost 60 percent of those not born in California were born in other parts of the United States.

In many years, net domestic migration to California was both positive and large. During the 1950s and early 1960s, annual net inflows consistently exceeded 200,000 per year (see Figure 1). Even as recently as the mid-1980s, net domestic inflows exceeded 100,000 per year. Before the 1990s, California had experienced net domestic outflows in only two years and those outflows were quite small: Between July 1970 and July 1972, 47,000 more people left California than moved to the state.

The 1990s were the first years in which California experienced tremendous net outflows of domestic migrants. These outflows reached their peak between July 1993 and July 1994, when over 400,000 more Californians left for other states than moved here from those states. Over the entire decade, as many as two million more people left the state than arrived from the rest of the country.[1] In this report, we seek to characterize this outflow. Who are these former Californians? Why did they leave the state? And what does this exodus portend for California's future population?

Who Is Leaving California?

As a group, domestic migrants entering California do not resemble those leaving the state. On average, newcomers have higher incomes, more education,

[1] Estimates of the net outflow vary substantially (see the text box, "Measuring Domestic Migration," on page 4). Despite the outflow of domestic migrants, California's population continued to grow during the 1990s through international immigration and natural increase. Although growth rates were substantially lower than in the 1980s, between 1990 and 1999 the state's population increased by 3.3 million people according to the Census Bureau and by 4.2 million people according to the California Department of Finance. According to the Census Bureau, the net inflow of 2.2 million international immigrants was offset by the net outflow of 2.2 million domestic migrants. Estimates by the California Department of Finance imply a much lower net outflow of about 1.2 million domestic migrants.

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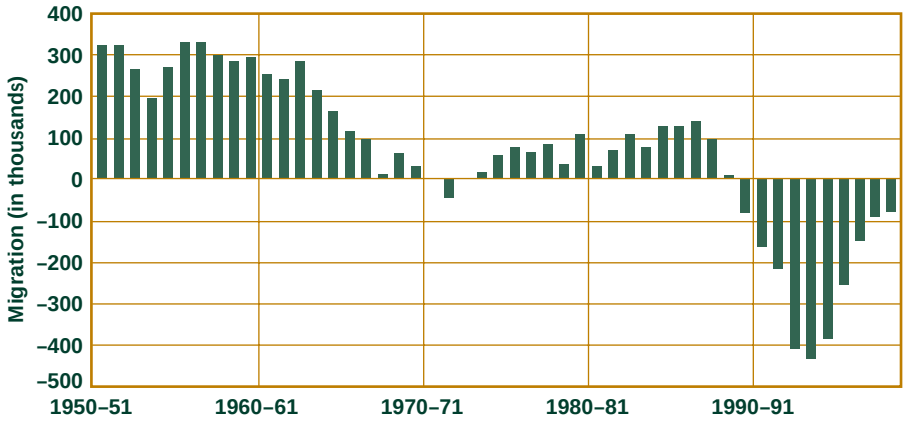
and are less likely to be married than those leaving California. They are also less likely to live in poverty and receive public assistance. Taken together, these characteristics suggest that California benefits from domestic migration by attracting relatively well-educated and high-earning populations. Still, the sheer magnitude of the domestic outflow during the 1990s means that California lost residents of every income and education level to other states.

Demographic Characteristics

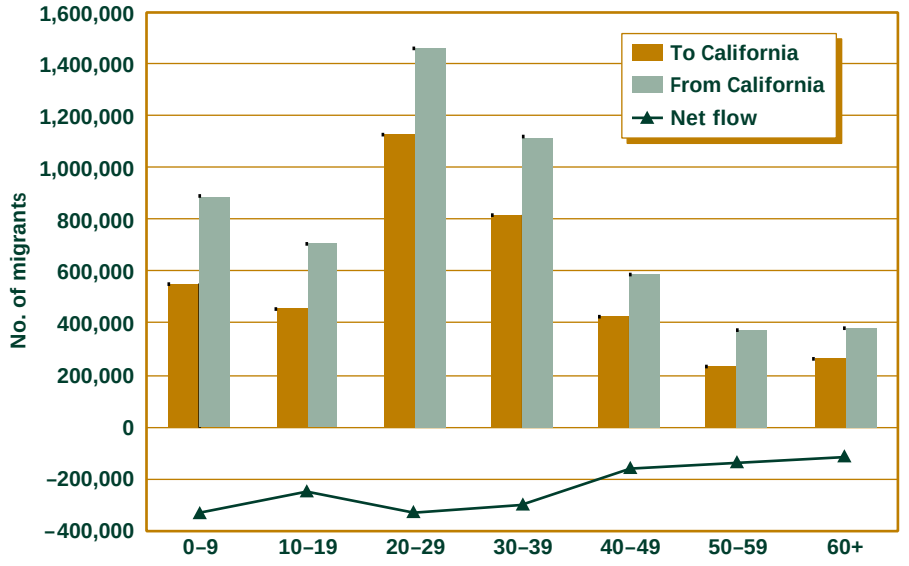
The propensity to migrate peaks at young adult ages—a time of life marked by the transitions of schooling, employment, marriage, and childbearing. This pattern holds for both men and women as well as for domestic migrants to and from California. Although California experienced net outflows of domestic migrants for every age group during the 1990s, the outflows were concentrated among young adults and their children (see Figure 2). As outflows from the state lessened in the late 1990s, the outflow of children actually increased (see Table 1). There are two reasons for this pattern. First, out-migrants in the late 1990s were more likely to have children than those who left in the early 1990s. Second, adults who came to California were less likely to have children than those who arrived earlier in the decade.

Figure 1. Annual Net Domestic Migration Between California and the Rest of the United States, 1950–1999



Sources: 1950–1970: PPIC estimates derived from the California Department of Finance and Immigration and Naturalization Service data.
1970–1993: PPIC estimates from Johnson (1996).
1994–1999: Census Bureau estimates.

Figure 2. Domestic Migrants by Age Group, 1990–1999



Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

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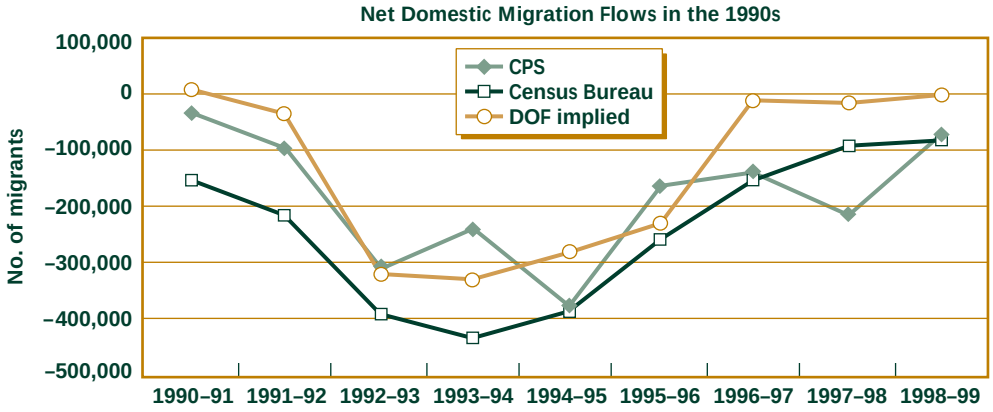
Measuring Domestic Migration

Estimating domestic migration is not an easy task, largely because the United States does not restrict or regulate movement between states or maintain any sort of universal address registration. In this report, we rely on estimates developed by the United States Census Bureau for *numbers* of domestic migrants; we also derive certain estimates from California Department of Finance (DOF) data. For *characteristics* of domestic migrants, we use the annual March supplements of the Current Population Survey (CPS).

Both the Census Bureau and the DOF develop annual estimates of net migration to and from California. The Census Bureau further breaks down net migration into net domestic and net international migration. For net domestic migration, the Census Bureau primarily relies on Internal Revenue Service data on address changes for tax filers. The Census Bureau estimates that during the 1990s, California experienced net domestic migration losses of 2.2 million people. The DOF relies primarily on driver license address changes to estimate domestic migration but publishes estimates only of total net migration. Our DOF implied estimates take the DOF total migration estimates and subtract Census Bureau estimates of net international migration. The DOF implied estimates suggest that the state lost 1.2 million people through domestic migration during the 1990s. The CPS places the net outflow at 1.6 million—higher than the derived estimate based on DOF numbers but substantially lower than the Census Bureau estimate. Although the levels are different between the estimates, the temporal patterns are consistent.



In the CPS, domestic migrants are identified by survey participants' responses to a question regarding residence one year before the survey. The survey includes a wealth of social, economic, and demographic information. However, we do not know the timing of a migrant's move within the year. Most of the characteristics we consider are determined at the time of the survey and thus reflect the respondent's status at the destination. Information on other characteristics, such as income and public assistance, is based on the year before the survey year, and thus reflects a migrant's condition at both the origin and the destination.

Because of small sample sizes, we pool the CPS data across years, providing estimates for the entire decade and in some cases for 1990–1995 and 1995–1999. It is important to remember that these are pooled estimates of annual domestic migration. The total sample consists of almost 5,000 domestic migrants to or from California. Even after pooling across years, however, sample sizes are small for certain subgroups. In the text, we note instances where point estimates are especially uncertain because of small sample sizes.

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With the exception of older movers, women and men were equally represented in domestic migration flows. Among those aged 60 and over, however, women constituted almost 60 percent of all domestic migrants. This higher proportion of women among elderly out-migrants reflects their longer life expectancies and thus greater numbers at older ages. Still, older Californians are less likely to move than younger adults, and net outflows at older ages were relatively small.

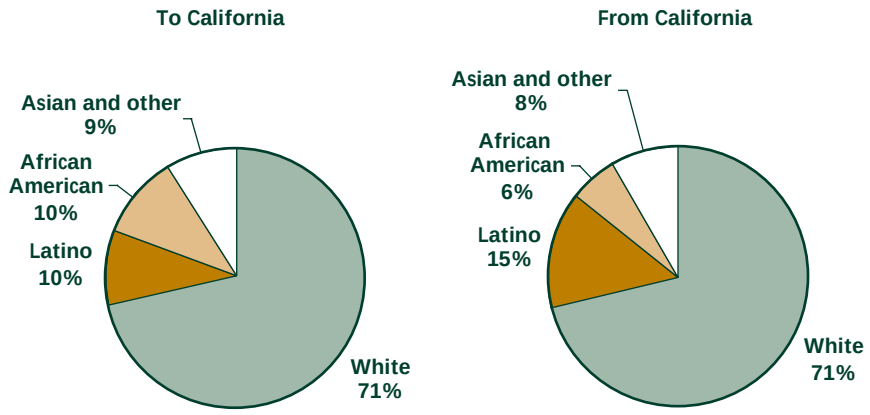
The vast majority of domestic migrants both to and from California were white (see Figure 3). Indeed, the percentage of whites who left the state is higher than the percentage of whites in California generally. In contrast, the domestic flows to California generally reflected the racial and ethnic composition of the rest of the United States.[2] The overrepresentation of whites among domestic out-migrants has led some observers to apply the term "white flight" or even "white fright" to describe this pattern. Although some whites may have left the state out of racial or ethnic prejudice, the overrepresentation of whites in the outflow is also a consequence of this group's more extensive social networks (includ-

Table 1. Net Domestic Migration by Age

	Average Annual		Total
	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
0–19	–45,000	–91,000	–588,000
20–39	–103,000	–29,000	–633,000
40–59	–41,000	–25,000	–305,000
60+	–21,000	–3,000	–117,000
All ages	–210,000	–148,000	–1,642,000

Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

Figure 3. Domestic Migrants by Race/Ethnicity



Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

[2] The exception is for Asians and others, constituting only 4 percent of the entire U.S. population, but 9 percent of domestic migrants to California.

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By the end of the 1990s, California was experiencing much more "Latino flight" and "Asian flight" than "white flight."

ing job networks) outside California as well as a greater likelihood of retirement-based migration among white migrants than among other groups.[3] Between 1990 and 1999, California experienced a net outflow of more than one million whites, although the annual net outflows declined substantially toward the end of the decade (see Table 2).

California also experienced a large net outflow of Latinos. Between 1990 and 1999, almost a half-million more Latinos left California for other parts of the United States than arrived from other states. This pattern indicates that Latinos are dispersing across the nation even as large numbers are arriving in California from Mexico and other countries. States with the greatest rates of Latino population growth in the 1990s included Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, all of which are popular destinations for those leaving California.

A higher proportion of Asians and African Americans arrived in California than left for other states. For African Americans, this gap led to positive net migration flows to California for the entire decade.[4] Asians experienced positive domestic migration in the early 1990s but net outflows in the second part of the decade.

By the end of the decade, increased movement of Latinos and Asians out of the state led to a shift in the composition of domestic out-migrants. Early in the decade, 76 percent of out-migrants were white; by 1998–1999, only 59 percent were white, and net outflows of Latinos and Asians exceeded that of whites. By the end of the 1990s, California was experiencing much more "Latino flight" and "Asian flight" than "white flight."

While California continued to receive large numbers of immigrants from abroad, the state lost

[3] Whites constitute almost three of every four Californians over age 65.

Table 2. Net Domestic Migration Flows by Race/Ethnicity

	Average Annual		Total
	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
White	–188,000	–45,000	–1,166,000
Latino	–33,000	–54,000	–431,000
African American	6,000	7,000	65,000
Asian and other	5,000	–27,000	–110,000

Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

[4] Because of small sample sizes, the estimate of net flow for African Americans is uncertain. The point estimate of the net flow for 1990–1999 is 65,000, but the 90 percent confidence interval (–19,000 to 150,000) includes the possibility that the net flow was negative.

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almost 200,000 foreign-born people to other states between 1993 and 1999 (see Table 3).[5] Still, foreign-born residents of California are less likely to move to other states than are U.S.-born residents of California. The difference is especially pronounced for third and subsequent generations, who constitute 54 percent of all Californians but 71 percent of domestic out-migrants. The relatively lower propensity of the foreign-born to move from California is not particularly surprising, as they have already chosen the state as their preferred destination in their international migration.

Before the 1990s, California served as a gateway for domestic migrants to the rest of the West, attracting migrants from distant states, particularly from the Northeast, and sending migrants to the rest of the West. During the 1990s, domestic migrants to California were still more likely to originate in the Northeast than domestic migrants from California were to settle in the Northeast, and the West remained the favored destination of migrants from California. However, the large domestic outflows of the 1990s meant that California lost domestic migrants to every region of the country (see Figure 4).

[5] The CPS did not identify immigrant status until 1994, providing information on migrants from 1993.

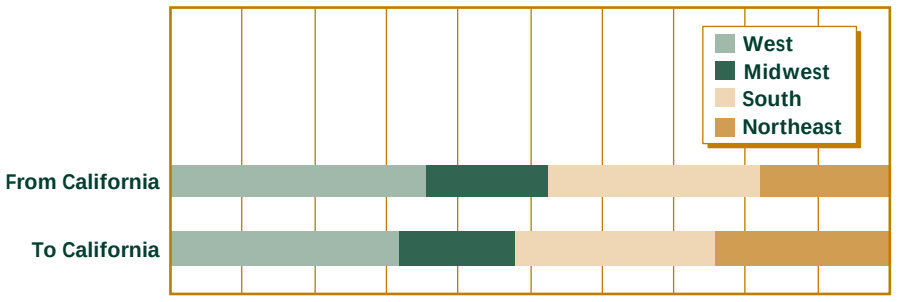
Table 3. Domestic Migrants by Immigrant Status, 1993–1999

	Percentage Distribution			Absolute Flows of Net Domestic Migration
	California Residents	Domestic Migrants		
		To California	From California	
First generation	25	16	16	–184,000
Second generation	20	10	14	–256,000
Third+ generation	54	74	71	–764,000
All generations	100	100	100	

Note: First generation immigrants are people born outside the United States; the second generation consists of people with at least one parent born abroad; and third and subsequent generations (third+) are those with both parents born in the United States.

Source: 1994–1999 CPS.

Figure 4. Domestic Migration by Region of Origin and Destination, 1990–1999



	To California	From California
West	1,234,000	1,968,000
Midwest	618,000	924,000
South	1,086,000	1,621,000
Northeast	931,000	997,000

Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

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Almost half the net outflow was to other states in the West, with the greatest losses to Arizona, Texas, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (see Table 4).[6] These net losses to the rest of the West declined substantially in the late 1990s. Over the course of the decade, California experienced net migration gains from only 12 states. Of these, the largest gains were from Illinois, Alaska, Massachusetts, Hawaii, and Connecticut.

Compared to the rest of the country, California tends to be relatively unattractive to out-of-state families and relatively desirable among domestic migrants living alone or with roommates. Almost half of California's net outflow consisted of people living in married-couple families with children (see Table 5). People who live alone or with unrelated roommates make up 14 percent of California's population but 24 percent of those moving here from other states. They also account for 20 percent of California's out-migrants.

Economic Characteristics and Educational Attainment

During the 1990s, California experienced a net domestic migration loss of more than 700,000 poor or near poor, accounting for just under half of the total net outflow.[7] Poverty rates are substantially higher for domestic migrants who leave California than for U.S.

[6] All these states, with the exception of Texas, are in the West. The Census Bureau considers Texas to be in the South.

[7] We define the near poor as those who live at 1.0 to 1.5 times the poverty rate.

Table 4. Leading States of Origin and Destination, 1990–1999

States with Greatest Gross Flows				States with Greatest Net Flows			
To California		From California		To California		From California	
Washington	396,000	Washington	534,000	Illinois	59,000	Arizona	–233,000
Texas	338,000	Texas	523,000	Alaska	47,000	Texas	–185,000
Oregon	233,000	Arizona	449,000	Massachusetts	47,000	Oregon	–141,000
Arizona	216,000	Oregon	374,000	Hawaii	47,000	Washington	–138,000
Florida	192,000	Nevada	320,000	Connecticut	45,000	Nevada	–133,000

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residents who come to California. This difference was accentuated in the last half of the decade, when almost 25 percent of out-migrants were living in poverty (see Table 6).

The use of public assistance by domestic migrants mirrors these poverty rates. Domestic migrants receiving public assistance were more likely to leave California than to arrive here (3.4 percent versus 2.2 percent). They were also less likely to receive public assistance than were California's other residents. Despite the state's relatively generous welfare payments and less restrictive eligibility rules, the difference in public assistance receipt between in-migrants and out-migrants actually increased in the last half of the 1990s. Between 1995 and 1999, only 1.2 percent of domestic migrants to California reported receiving public assistance compared to 3.5 percent of California's out-migrants.

Similarly, household incomes tended to be higher for domestic migrants to California (22 percent of whom live in households with annual incomes of at least $80,000) than for those who left the state (17 percent of whom reported that income).[8] Nevertheless, California experienced net losses of domestic migrants for every income group. For the entire decade, those losses were concentrated in the lower income groups (see

Net losses of domestic migrants were concentrated in the lower income groups.

Table 5. Net Domestic Migration by Household and Family Type

	Average Annual Net Migration		Total
	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
Married with children	–86,700	–77,400	–742,800
Single parent	–25,300	–36,100	–270,500
Married without children	–51,800	–17,900	–330,400
Other family	–15,400	–13,200	–129,400
Nonfamily	–28,800	0	–143,800

Note: Other families consist of unmarried but otherwise related individuals living together; nonfamilies consist of people living alone or with unrelated roommates.

Table 6. Poverty Rates for Domestic Migrants and California Residents (in percent)

	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
Domestic migrants			
To California	15.8	15.4	15.6
From California	16.8	23.2	19.4
All California residents	16.4	16.6	16.5

[8] Incomes are in 1998 dollars.

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Almost two of every three migrants to California either attended or graduated from college, compared to only about half of those leaving the state.

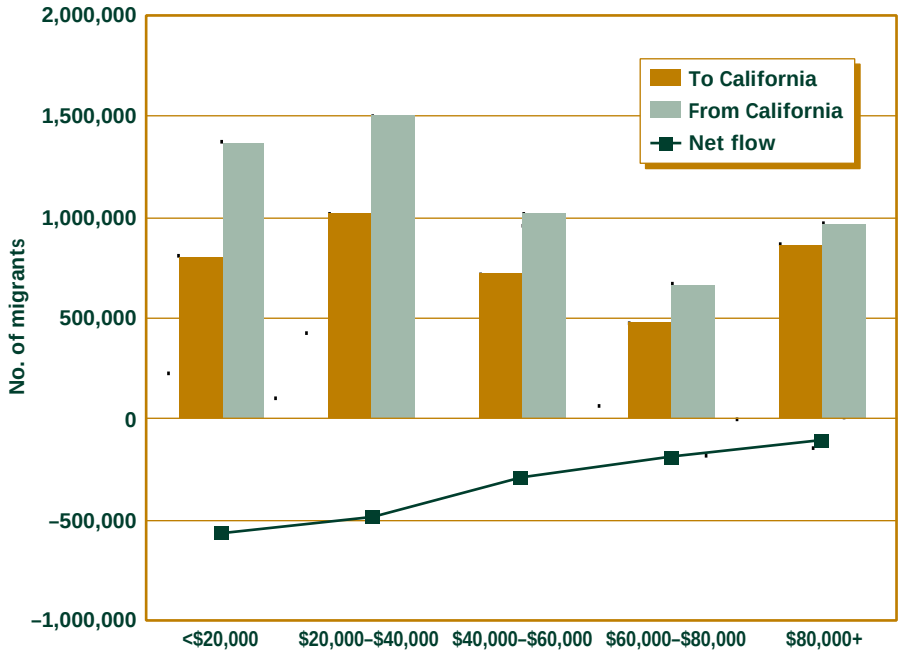
Figure 5). By the latter half of the decade, net losses of high-income migrants had ceased, while net losses of low-income households continued unabated (see Table 7).

For migrants over age 18, labor force participation rates are virtually identical for domestic in-migrants and out-migrants. However, unemployment rates are substantially higher for those who left the state (see Table 8).[9] Because California's unemployment rate was higher than the nation's throughout this period, it appears that many who left California did so to seek employment. In contrast, many newcomers to California seem to have had jobs in hand or strong prospects for obtaining one.

Domestic migrants to California also tended to be better educated than those who left California. Almost two of every

[9] People are considered a part of the labor force if they are either employed or unemployed but looking for work. These labor force data are primarily based on the migrant's status at the destination.

Figure 5. Domestic Migrants by Household Income, 1990–1999



Note: Income in 1999 dollars.
Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

Table 7. Net Domestic Migration by Household Income

Income ($ thousands)	Average Annual		Total
	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
<20	–59,000	–67,000	–564,000
20–40	–73,000	–30,000	–486,000
40–60	–34,000	–31,000	–297,000
60–80	–24,000	–17,000	–191,000
80+	–19,000	–2,000	–104,000

Note: Incomes are in 1998 dollars.

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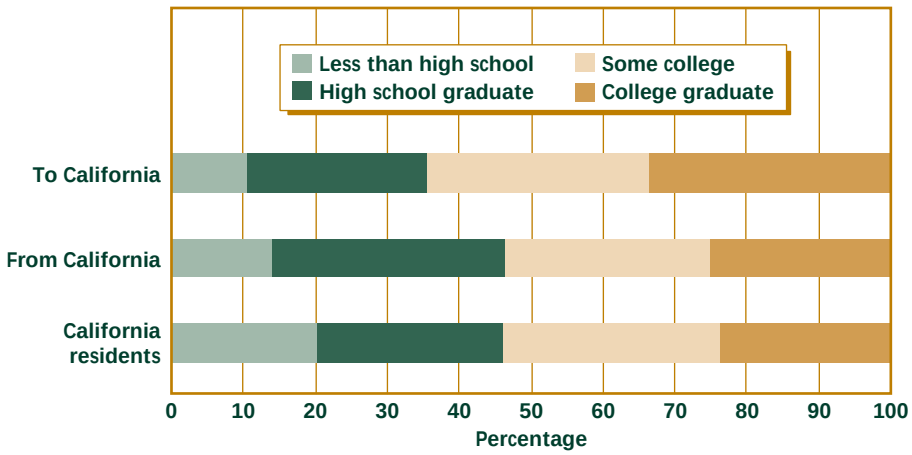
Table 8. Unemployment Rates of Domestic Migrants (in percent)

	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
To California	11.6	8.3	9.9
From California	15.4	10.8	13.4

Note: For almost all domestic migrants, labor force status is determined at the destination.

Figure 6. Distribution of Residents and Domestic Migrants by Educational Attainment



Note: For adults aged 18 and over; domestic migration estimates based on 1990–1999 moves; California residents estimates based on average for 1998 and 1999.

Source: 1991–1999 CPS.

California's deep recession of the early 1990s coincides with its greatest net outflows.

three migrants to California either attended or graduated from college, compared to only about half of those leaving the state (see Figure 6). Even so, California lost more residents than it gained at every level of educational attainment. The losses were especially large among those who had a high school diploma or less. In the last half of the 1990s, however, California experienced a small net inflow of college graduates (see Table 9).

Why Leave California?

People move for many reasons. They seek better jobs, better climates, new landscapes, or to be with family. Domestic migrants move to and from California for all these reasons and more. Over the past two decades, economic motives seemed to have been paramount. California's deep recession of the early 1990s coincides with its greatest net outflows. That

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Through domestic migration, California has been able to attract labor when it is needed and to alleviate unemployment when jobs are relatively scarce.

Table 9. Net Domestic Migration Flows by Educational Attainment

	Average Annual		Total
	1990–1995	1995–1999	1990–1999
Less than high school	–42,000	–18,000	–259,000
High school graduate	–80,000	–46,500	–587,000
Some college	–34,800	–17,250	–242,000
College graduate	–18,200	15,250	–30,000
All adults	–175,000	–66,500	–1,118,000

Note: Tabulations for adults aged 18 and over.

many of these out-migrants were young workers suggests that economic concerns, particularly the availability of jobs, were central to their decisions to leave the state. The relatively high cost of living in California may have been another economic consideration. For the small but not insignificant share of elderly out-migrants, other western states may have offered California's amenities but with less congestion and a lower cost of living.

Net domestic migration flows over the last two decades track the unemployment rate differential between California and the rest of the United States (see Figure 7). When California's unemployment rate approximates the rate in the rest of the nation, the state tends to experience net inflows of domestic migrants. However, net outflows have been large when the unemployment rate is substantially higher in California than elsewhere, as was the case in the early 1990s. Through domestic migration, California has been able to attract labor when it is needed and to alleviate unemployment when jobs are relatively scarce.

California's Future Domestic Migration Patterns

Will California become the next demographic New York—a state that receives substantial flows of international immi-

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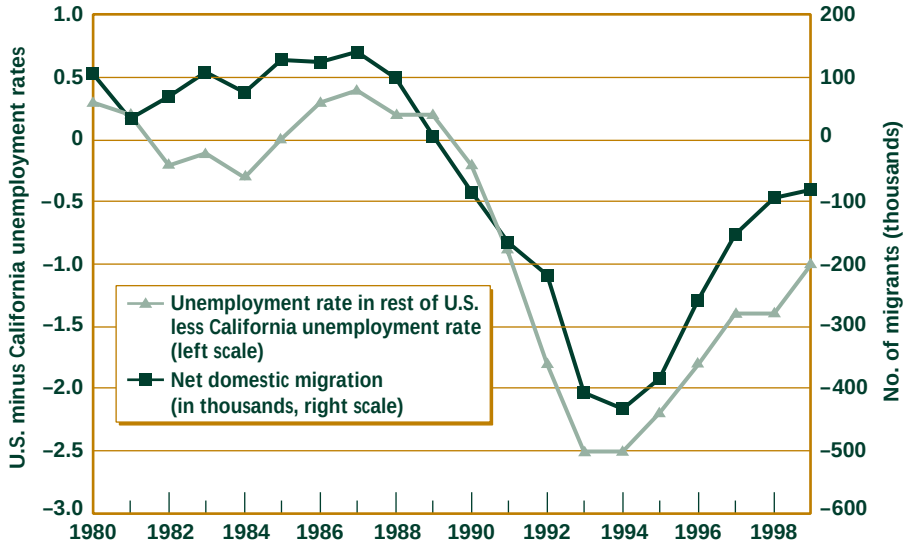
grants and sends out large numbers of domestic migrants? Although California has served as a gateway to the rest of the West, it seems unlikely that California will follow New York's pattern, at least in the near future. For many decades, New York has been a net exporter of domestic migrants. So far, California has been a net exporter of domestic migrants only in the 1990s. Its largest losses occurred during the deep recession of the early 1990s (see Figure 8), and the most recent estimates suggest that the net outflow abated substantially in the late 1990s. The DOF estimates that California currently receives about as many domestic migrants as it sends out (see the text box, "Measuring Domestic Migration," on page 4).

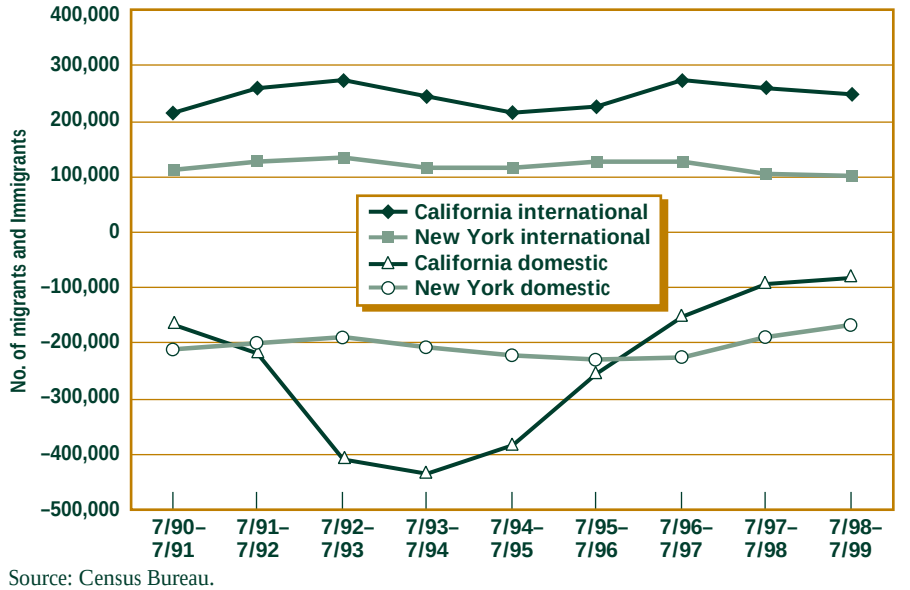
With respect to migration patterns, a more likely scenario is that Los Angeles will come to resemble New York City but that the rest of California will not take after upstate New York, which has experienced little population growth. Movement out of Los Angeles, which felt the recession more severely than other parts of the state, drove most of California's net domestic outflows; but the rest of California has experienced rapid population growth, fueled partly by inflows from Los Angeles. Even this comparison between Los Angeles and New York City may overstate their demographic similarities. Unlike New York City, Los Angeles has

Figure 7. Unemployment Rate Differences and Net Domestic Migration Follow the Same Pattern



Source: 1991–1999 CPS; California Employment Development Department.

Figure 8. Net International Immigration and Net Domestic Migration for California and New York in the 1990s



Source: Census Bureau.

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The state's demographic future may lie somewhere between its history in the more distant past and that of the 1990s.

continued to grow substantially as net domestic outflows are more than offset by international immigration and natural increase. When Los Angeles recovers fully from the recession—its unemployment rates are still substantially higher than those in the rest of the country—net domestic migration could once again become positive.

The state's demographic future may lie somewhere between its history in the more distant past and that of the 1990s. The huge domestic flows to California during the 1950s and early 1960s are unlikely to be repeated as the nation ages (older people are less likely to move) and international immigrants satisfy a large portion of California's labor needs. The large outflows of the early 1990s probably will not be repeated either, as the recession of the early 1990s stemmed from a rare confluence of events. Even so, California's pool of potential out-migrants may be growing as Asians and especially Latinos find other parts of the country more attractive. Although large outflows from California are unlikely to continue, they may be more likely than a return to huge inflows of the 1950s and early 1960s.

California has long benefited from domestic migration exchanges with the rest of the country. Even during the tremendous outflows of the 1990s, domestic migrants to California tended to be more highly skilled than those who left the state. Regardless of the direction of net domestic migration flows, this pattern is unlikely to change. California continues to attract a broad range of international immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, many with very high levels of education and many more with very little. Within the United States, California discourages those who are unlikely to succeed in a high-cost, mostly urban economy. California's demographic profile differs from New York's, but the two places may have something in common: If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere. ◆

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